

3/16/91

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ACTION ARA-16

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 INR-10 SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 IO-14
NSCE-00 NSAE-00 SSO-00 SY-05 HA-06 PM-09 DCT-0
INRE-00 SYE-00 SP-02 /080 W

O 161609Z MAR 81
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8825

SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 1834

EO 12065: RDS-3 3/16/01 (FRIEDMAN, T.B.) OR-P
TAGS: SHUM, OVIP, AR
SUBJECT: [REDACTED] APPARENT TEMPORARY DISAPPEARANCES

REF: FRIEDMAN-WHITMAN TELCONS

1. [REDACTED] SUMMARY: AS THE DEPARTMENT KNOWS, TWO ARGENTINE MALES WERE THE VICTIMS OF WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A TEMPORARY DISAPPEARANCE. THEY WERE REPORTEDLY SEIZED AT THEIR HOMES IN FRONT OF WITNESSES MARCH 11 AND MARCH 12 BY ARMED MEN WHO REFUSED TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES. THEY WERE PLACED IN CARS AND DRIVEN AWAY WITH THEIR HEADS COVERED BY SACKS. SUBSEQUENTLY, THEIR RELATIVES WERE UNABLE TO LOCATE THEM IN ANY PLACE OF DETENTION. THE EMBASSY WAS INFORMED OF THESE REPORTED EVENTS MARCH 14. WE RELAYED THEM TO THE STAFF OF PRESIDENT VIDELA AND [REDACTED] TO MEN CLOSE TO PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE VIOLA. THERE WAS NO NEED TO ELABORATE ON HOW THESE REPORTED EVENTS COULD CLOUD VIOLA'S TRIP TO THE U.S. IN THE MEANTIME, THE FATHER OF ONE OF THE MISSING MEN WAS IN TOUCH WITH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS HERE AND THROUGH THEM TO THE LOCAL PRESS AND TO INTERESTED PARTIES OUTSIDE ARGENTINA. WE WERE ADVISED LATE MARCH 14 BY THIS FATHER THAT HIS SON AND THE OTHER MISSING MAN HAD BEEN RELEASED AT ABOUT 2100 HOURS LOCAL. BOTH MEN WERE AT THEIR RESPECTIVE HOMES, HE SAID. HOWEVER, NEITHER THE FAMILY NOR ANYBODY ELSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH HAS YET BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM THAT THE OTHER MAN HAS BEEN FREED; HIS SON WAS

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BADLY MISTREATED WHILE IN CUSTODY, THE FATHER ALLEGES. WE DO NOT KNOW AT THIS POINT WHAT WAS THE IMMEDIATE MOTIVATION FOR THESE

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

() Release (X) Excise () Deny

Exemptions(s):

Declassify: (X) In Part () In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date 2/16/01 Declassify on Reason 2.5X1

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ARRESTS OR WHAT MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITHIN THE REGIME, SUCH AS WHETHER THEY ARE PART OF A PATTERN WITH EARLIER EVENTS. BUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES (NOTABLY THE RESUMPTION OF THIS PRACTICE, AFTER A NUMBER OF MONTHS, ON THE EVE OF VIOLA'S VISIT) STRONGLY SUGGEST THIS. THE MOST LIKELY HYPOTHESIS, WE CONCLUDE, IS THAT THESE DETENTIONS HAVE BEEN AUTHORIZED BY THE SAME MAN WHO APPROVED THE ARRESTS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS TWO WEEKS AGO AND THE BRIEF JAILING OF THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DEL MAYO MARCH 12. IF SO, THE ULTIMATE TARGET WAS PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE VIOLA AND THE PURPOSE WOULD HAVE BEEN TO REAFFIRM A HARD-LINE ON THE REGIME'S INTERNAL SECURITY PRACTICES, VENTILATE DISPLEASURE, AND EMBARRASS VIOLA AS HE SETS OUT ON HIS VISIT TO THE US. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) EARLY MARCH 14 THE EMBASSY WAS INFORMED BY LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS OF THE REPORTED DETENTION OF TWO YOUNG MEN IN CIRCUMSTANCES THAT HAD ALL THE HALLMARKS OF PAST DISAPPEARANCES. AS THE DAY WENT ALONG INCREASING DETAILS EMERGED. THE TWO INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED WERE JORGE MAGNINO AND HECTOR PINON. THOUGH MAGNINO'S FAMILY FILED A HABEAS CORPUS IN BEHALF OF THEIR SON, PINON'S FATHER WAS FAR MORE ACTIVE IN SPREADING WORD OF THE YOUNG MEN'S APPARENT DISAPPEARANCES. HE IS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF MOST OF WHAT WE NOW KNOW.

3. (U) THE EVENTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

A. ON MARCH 11 ARMED MEN IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES ARRIVED IN THE EARLY MORNING AT THE HOME OF MAGNINO, LOCATED IN THE BUENOS AIRES WORKING CLASS SUBURB OF HAEDO. WITHOUT IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES, THEY TOOK MAGNINO OFF IN A CAR WITH HIS HEAD COVERED BY A SACK. MAGNINO'S WIFE WITNESSED THIS PROCEDURE.

B. ALSO ON MARCH 11, BUT LATER, A GROUP OF ARMED MEN ALSO DRESSED IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES SEARCHED THE HOME OF MAGNINO'S MOTHER-IN-LAW
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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BUT DID NOT SEIZE ANYBODY.

C. ON MARCH 12, A GROUP OF ABOUT 60 ARMED MEN, DRESSED IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES WHO REFUSED TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES SEALED OFF THE AREA AROUND THE HOME OF JOSE PINON, WHERE HIS SON HECTOR LIVES, WHICH IS ALSO LOCATED IN HAEDO. AFTER SEARCHING A HOME IN FRONT OF THE PINON RESIDENCE THEY ENTERED THE LATTER. WHEN THE YOUNGER PINON ARRIVED HOME THE MEN DETAINED HIM, DRIVING HIM OFF WITH HIS HEAD COVERED. THE FATHER CLAIMS THAT THE RAIDERS ALSO TOOK ITEMS OF VALUE FROM THE HOME.

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	INRE-00	SYE-00	SP-02	/080 W			

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4. [REDACTED] THE ELDER PINON TOLD US THAT HIS SON AND MAGNINO WORKED IN THE SAME LEATHER GOODS FACTORY. HE DENIED THAT HIS SON HAD ANY POLITICAL OR LABOR AFFILIATION THAT WOULD EXPLAIN HIS SEEMING DETENTION. ALL CONVERSATIONS WITH HIM HAVE BEEN BY PHONE AND THEREFORE CIRCUMSPECT. WE HOPE TO SEE HIM PERSONALLY SOON TO LEARN MORE. (HOWEVER, WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE PEOPLE HOLDING HIS SON WERE MOST INTERESTED IN LOCATING ANOTHER ONE OF THE PINON SONS. THIS OTHER SON ACCORDING TO PINON IS ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE WORKERS AT THE CANTABRICA STEEWORKERS WHO ARE MAKING A VERY NOISY PUBLIC PROTEST OVER THE CLOSING FOR ECONOMIC REASONS OF THE CANTABRICA PLANT. ONE DELEGATION OF CANTABRICA WORKERS WAS RECEIVED BY THE POPE.)

5. [REDACTED] REPORTEDLY, THE PINON AND MAGNINO FAMILIES IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO LOOK FOR THE TWO MISSING MEN. POLICE DENIED HOLDING THEM. ULTIMATELY, PINON, AT LEAST, CONTACTED LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS. IT WAS THROUGH THEM ON MARCH 14 THAT WE FIRST HEARD OF THESE EVENTS. IN OUR EXPERIENCE A LAG OF 48 TO 72 HOURS BETWEEN THE TIME A PERSON IS THE VICTIM OF AN APPARENT DISAPPEARANCE AND THE MOMENT HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS BEGIN TO RAISE ALARMS IS NOT AT ALL UNUSUAL. IT WAS APPARENT, TOO, THAT LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS WERE ALERTING THE LOCAL PRESS AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS TO THESE EVENTS. (SOME OF THE BUENOS AIRES PAPERS REPORTED THESE DISAPPEARANCES MARCH 15. THE RELEASE WAS REPORTED MARCH 16.)

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6. [REDACTED] THE EMBASSY CONTACTED A MEMBER OF PRESIDENT VIDELA'S STAFF AND [REDACTED] A SOURCE WITH RAPID ACCESS TO PRESIDENT VIOLA TO DESCRIBE THE EVENTS ABOVE. THERE WAS NO NEED TO ELABORATE ON HOW SUCH APPARENT DISAPPEARANCES, UNLESS CLEARED UP RAPIDLY, COULD SOUR THE PUBLIC CLIMATE FOR VIOLA'S VISIT. IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATIONS IT SEEMED CLEAR THAT OUR CALLS HAD ALERTED THE PRESIDENCY AND VIOLA'S TEAM TO THE PROBLEM AND THAT ONCE ALERTED THEY WERE MOVING TO RESOLVE IT. (B1)

7. (U) AT ABOUT MIDNIGHT MARCH 15 THE EMBASSY LEARNED FROM THE ELDER PINON THAT HIS SON WAS WITH HIM AT THEIR HOME. HE SAID THAT THE YOUNG MAN HAD BEEN RELEASED BY HIS CAPTORS IN AN EMPTY FIELD AT ABOUT 2100 HOURS THAT EVENING. AS THEY LET HIM GO THEY REPORTEDLY TOLD HIM "GET GOING. AND TELL YOUR FATHER NOT TO MAKE SO MUCH NOISE." THE SON STATED THAT MAGNINO WAS APPARENTLY RELEASED AT THE SAME TIME. THE FATHER REPORTED THAT HIS SON WAS "BADLY TORTURED" DURING HIS DETENTION. (WE HAVE NO INDEPENDENT CONFIRMATION THAT MAGNINO WAS RELEASED.)

8. [REDACTED] COMMENT: THERE IS MUCH MISSING FROM OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS EPISODE, AS DISTINCT FROM OTHERS OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS WHERE THE POLICE AND COURTS WERE OSTENSIBLY INVOLVED. IN THE COURSE OF THE COMING WEEK WE MAY LEARN MORE. IT IS POSSIBLE TO SPECULATE THAT IT WAS A FABRICATION, THAT IT WAS THE WORK OF THE LEFT OR THE MONTONEROS; THAT IT WAS THE WORK OF SOME POLITICAL OPPONENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT, OR THAT IT WAS THE WORK OF ELEMENTS IN THE SECURITY FORCES. ANY OF THESE GROUPS, OF COURSE, MIGHT WANT TO EMBARRASS THE GOA AND VIOLA ON THE EVE OF VIOLA'S VISIT TO THE U.S. AT THIS WRITING WE ARE INCLINED TO SEE THE SECURITY FORCES AS THE PROBABLE AUTHORS. IF THE ELDER PINON'S ACCOUNT IS ACCURATE, THERE ARE TOO MANY ALLEGED WITNESSES TO THESE EVENTS ESPECIALLY IN A COUNTRY WHERE FEAR IS STILL A VERY [REDACTED]

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REAL, IF REDUCED, ELEMENT FOR IT TO BE A FABRICATION; AND THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED IN THE ARRESTS WOULD SEEM TO PUT THEM BEYOND THE REACH OF THE MONTONEROS WHO APPEAR TO HAVE FEW IF ANY OPERATIVES IN THE COUNTRY. IT SEEMS TO US UNLIKELY THAT THE GOA'S CIVILIAN POLITICAL OPPONENTS WOULD HAVE THE WILL, THE COURAGE, AND THE ORGANIZATION TO CARRY OUT WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A FAIRLY LARGE AND EXTENSIVE OPERATION.

9. [REDACTED] THAT LEAVES ELEMENTS IN THE SECURITY FORCES. THE ARREST OF THE SIX HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FROM CELS AND THE BRIEF DETENTION OF THE MOTHERS, ACTS THAT AS WE HAVE NOTED COULD ONLY BEEN CARRIED OUT UNDER THE PROTECTION OF SOMEBODY HIGH IN GOVERN-

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MENT, NOURISH OUR SUSPICION. THUS, THERE EXISTS THE DISTINCT POSSIBILITY THAT THIS OPERATION FORMS PART OF A PATTERN, AND WAS CARRIED OUT WITH THE CONSENT OF ELEMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT (INTERIOR), OR THE ARMY AND THE TWO OTHER SERVICES. IF SO, THE DETENTIONS MAY REFLECT UNHAPPINESS AND UNEASE WITH VIOLA'S TRIP, A DESIRE TO REAFFIRM HARD-LINE INTERNAL SECURITY PRACTICES, OR EVEN TO DELIBERATELY CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR--AND WEAKEN--VIOLA PERSONALLY AS HE BEGINS HIS WASHINGTON CONSULTATIONS.

10. [REDACTED]

RUSER

[REDACTED]
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